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UNCLAS ROME 000568

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR DRL, IO, EAP

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PHUM PREL BM IT HUMAN RIGHTS

SUBJECT: BURMESE HUMAN RIGHTS TO BE SUBJECT OF CONFERENCE
HOSTED BY ITALY

REF: ROME 243 (NOTAL)

¶1. MFA UNDER SECRETARY FOR ASIA AND HUMAN RIGHTS
MARGHERITA BONIVER PUBLISHED AN OP-ED IN THE LOCAL JOURNAL
L'OPINIONE FEBRUARY 6 STATING THAT THE GOI INTENDS TO HOST A
CONFERENCE ON BURMESE HUMAN RIGHTS IN CONJUNCTION WITH ITS EU
PRESIDENCY, WHICH RUNS FROM JULY TO DECEMBER 2003. IT IS
UNCLEAR IF THIS IDEA IS AN ELABORATION OF THE CONFERENCE
PROPOSED REFTEL TO BRING TOGETHER MUSLIM AND WESTERN
COUNTRIES ON THE BASIS OF UNIVERSAL HUMAN RIGHTS.

¶2. FOLLOWING IS AN INFORMAL TRANSLATION OF THE TEXT OF
BONIVER'S ARTICLE.

BEGIN TEXT. WHEN IT COMES TO FOREIGN POLICY, EUROPE OFTEN
ENCOUNTERS MANY OBSTACLES IN FORGING A STANCE SHARED BY ALL
OF ITS MEMBERS. RIGHT NOW, IRAQ PROVIDES A DRAMATIC EXAMPLE.
FORTUNATELY, THIS IS NOT ALWAYS THE CASE. ON BURMA, FOR
EXAMPLE, THERE IS A COMMON POSITION. THE PRESS BLACKOUT
IMPOSED BY THE MILITARY REGIME THAT RULES MYANMAR HAS CREATED
A THICK MEDIA FOG OVER ITS INSUFFICIENT RESPECT FOR THE MOST
BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS AND ITS VIOLENCE AGAINST THE OPPPOSITION.
DESPITE BOTH GEOGRAPHIC DISTANCE AND WIDESPREAD SILENCE, THE
UNION HAS BEEN ABLE TO EXPRESS A FIRM CONDEMNATION
ACCOMPANIED BY STRICT POLITICAL SANCTIONS THAT AT THE
INTERNATIONAL LEVEL, COMPLETELY ISOLATED THE MILITARY JUNTA,
WHICH HAS BEEN IN POWER FOR MANY YEARS. AS A MATTER OF FACT,
IN 1999 (NOTE: APPEARS TO BE AN ERROR; SHOULD READ 1990 END
NOTE) FREE ELECTIONS TOOK PLACE, RESULTING IN THE VICTORY OF
THE NATIONAL LEAGUE FOR DEMOCRACY UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF
NOBEL PEACE PRICE LAUREATE MRS. AUNG SAN SUU KYI. THE
ELECTORAL MANDATE WAS NEVER HONORED, AND THE BRAVE LEADER
(JUST RECENTLY SET FREE) WAS PUT UNDER HOUSE ARREST.

AT THIS POINT, IT IS CLEAR THAT POLITICAL SANCTIONS SHOULD BE
CONSIDERED INSUFFICIENT. INDEED, BURMESE ARE NOT ONLY
EXPERIENCING A LACK OF FREEDOM UNDER A DESPOTIC AND CRUEL
DICTATORSHIP, BUT ALSO TERRIBLE POVERTY, AN ECONOMY LACKING
IN RESOURCES (WITH THE EXCEPTION OF OPIUM), AND A TREMENDOUS
NUMBER OF PEOPLE AFFECTED BY AIDS.

IT IS, THEREFORE, NECESSARY TO MAKE INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC
OPINION AWARE NOT ONLY OF THE ANCIENT ARCHITECTURAL,
HISTORICAL, AND CULTURAL TREASURES OF THE COUNTRY, BUT
ESPECIALLY OF ITS CURRENT PROBLEMS, WHICH TOURISTS ONLY
BARELY PERCEIVE WITH CARELESS APATHY. DURING THE RECENT
ASEAN SUMMIT (THE RECURRING CONFERENCE BETWEEN THE EU AND THE
TEN COUNTRIES OF SOUTH-EAST ASIA) HELD IN BRUSSELS A FEW DAYS
AGO, ITALY, WHICH I REPRESENTED, RAISED THE BURMA ISSUE BY
POINTING TO THE FACT THAT THE POSITION THUS FAR MAINTAINED BY
THE 15 MEMBERS, IN SPITE OF ITS FIRM DETERMINATION, HAS NOT
PRODUCED CONCRETE RESULTS.

THE BURMESE ARE SUFFERING, ALL FREEDOMS -- EVEN THE MOST
BASIC ONES -- CONTINUE TO BE DENIED, AND THERE IS NO REASON
TO ANTICIPATE POSITIVE CHANGE EITHER IN THE SHORT OR MEDIUM
TERM. IN OUR OPINION, IT IS TIME TO CHANGE TACK. WE PROPOSE
A MORE RESOLUTE INTERVENTION AGAINST THE REGIME BY RELYING ON
EU JOINT ACTION IN CLOSE COOPERATION WITH UN SPECIAL
REPRESENTATIVE FOR BURMA RAZALI. THEREFORE, IT IS OUR
INTENTION TO USE THE PLATFORM OF THE ITALIAN EU PRESIDENCY
DURING THE FORTHCOMING SEMESTER TO ORGANIZE AN INTERNATIONAL
EVENT THAT WILL ATTRACT MEDIA ATTENTION TO THE BURMESE
SITUATION, WHICH IS RARELY ADDRESSED.

SEPTEMBER 11 MARKED A WATERSHED AND ELICITED UNANIMOUS
CONDEMNATION. IT IS NO LONGER POSSIBLE TO IGNORE, WHETHER
DUE TO LAZINESS OR CONVENIENCE, TERRIBLE SITUATIONS THAT WE
KNOW COULD FOSTER TERRORISM. THE HARDSHIPS AND ISOLATION OF
ANY COUNTRY, AT ANY LATITUDE, CAN NO LONGER BE NEGLECTED:
NOBODY IS SAFE FROM THE THREAT OF TERRORISM.

END TEXT.
SEMBLER